

Vistas-(Supplementary Reader)Chapter -1

The Third Level (Summary)

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The story revolves around a 31 year old man named Charley, who experienced something weird. One day after work coming from the Subway, he reached the third level of the Grand Central station (which doesn't actually exist). He reminisces the entire experience with his psychiatrist friend Sam. Charley thought he experienced time travel and had reached somewhere in the eighteen-nineties, a time before the world saw two of its most deadliest wars. As soon as he realised what time he is in, he immediately decided to buy two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois; one for himself and the other for his wife. Unfortunately, the currency used in that century was different. Thus, the next day he withdrew all his savings and got them converted even if it meant bearing losses. He went looking for the third level but failed to find it. It worried his wife and the psychiatrist Sam who told him that he is hallucinating in order to take refuge from reality and miseries of the modern world which is full of worry. Charley thus resorts to his stamp collection in order to distract himself when suddenly one day he finds a letter from his friend Sam who had gone missing recently. Sam wrote that he always wanted to believe in the idea of third level and now that he is there himself, he encourages Charley and Louisa to never stop looking for it.

Question 1: Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?

Answer -Yes, the third level was a medium of escape for Charley. Life in the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worries and stress. A person has to struggle with these realities for his existence. The harsh realities of life make living quite unpleasant, tough and sometimes unbearable. A person resorts to escapism when he finds it difficult to confront with these difficulties in life.

Charley possesses an escapist tendency. It is certainly a medium of escape for him. Actually there was no *'third level'* at all. It was merely a psychological shift in time and space of Charley's own mind where he combines fantasy with reality. Charley finds comfort and peace in a world of fancy and romance. He finds himself into the world of 1894. It was a world of romance with wooden gates, derby hats, beards, and sideburns. Everything was very nice and peaceful where he did not require any refuge from reality.

Question 2: What do you infer from Sam's letter to Charley

Answer - In his letter Sam had written that he had found the Third Level, two weeks ago. According to the letter he was very happy to be in a very peaceful and hospitable town.

But the way Charley comes across Sam's letter is quite mysterious. The various circumstances in which Charley found the letter and also described it indicate that the letter is another piece of Charley's escapist fantasies. In other words, it is another "walking-dream wish fulfillment" of Charley.

Question 3: "The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry, and stress." What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?

Answer -Unlike the good old days, the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry, and stress. The constant struggling with these harsh realities for our existence makes our lives unpleasant and bitter. We attempt to overcome them through wishful thinking and escape into the world of fantasy. One takes refuge into the unreal world of imagination forgetting harsh realities. This could be a psychological shift in time and space for one's mind. Some people who are of creative minds find some useful occupation to overcome negative thoughts. Some keep themselves busy in social service whereas some writes poems,

stories, and plays to find an emotional refuge or solace in an imaginary world.

Charley in the lesson "The Third Level" too indulges in fantasies in order to overcome the stress and strain of our modern world. Philately keeps the past alive for him.

Question 4: Do you see an intersection of time and space in the story?

Answer - Yes, there is an intersection of time and space in the story The Third Level.

In the story the narrator moves from present to past. Along with time there is a shift of space and place too. From his real presence in New York, he imagines himself in Galesburg, Illinois. This shift of time and space is totally psychological or imaginary. In the story 'The Third Level', the narrator (Charley) belongs to the present time but describes an experience of the last century on his imaginary 'Third Level'. Later he opens an envelope which somebody mailed to his grandfather at his home in Galesburg. The postmark shows that it has been there among the first-day covers since July 18, 1894. Surprisingly it has a note written by Sam dated July 18, 1894 and addressed to the narrator Charley. All these seem to be highly illogical and confusing. This is because the writer has made intersection of different times and spaces in his story.